

**THE MARK OF KANE**

(Part One of the Four-Color Trilogy)

Sample Version

By  
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"Comics are one of the five native American art forms,  
including banjo music, jazz music, musical theatre, and the  
mystery story as invented by Edgar Allen Poe."

- Harlan Ellison

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ACT ONE - SCENE SEVEN

Bill's apartment. He sits in an easy chair, reading a copy of THE SHADOW. He occasionally stops and jots down a note in his book. He stands and begins to pace, "performing" from the pulp magazine.

Projected: The cover of THE SHADOW #113 - "Partners of Peril"

FINGER

"I've had his help on dozens of cases. I've never been able to find out his identity. He remains anonymous, by his own wishes. But whoever he is, I'd say he's the cleverest and most daring detective in America!"

He drops the performance, and chuckles at himself.

FINGER

I envy you Maxwell Grant, if that is your real name, you're almost as good as Gibson himself.

He pours himself a short glass of whiskey.

FINGER

(a la the radio show)

"WHO KNOWS WHAT EVIL LURKS IN THE HEARTS OF MEN!?!? THE SHADOW KNOWS!!! BWAHHAHAHAHAHA!!!"

He plops back down in his chair.

FINGER

Someday, Billy-boy. Someday you'll get your chance.

There is a knock at the door. Bill gets up and lets in Bob, who is carrying a portfolio.

KANE

Good, you're home.

FINGER

Yes, you're lucky. My social calendar is overflowing.

KANE

I need your help. Big-time project.

FINGER

Big time? Lemme guess, more Rusty and his Pals bits? I got some stuff in the book...

KANE

Bigger than Rusty! Biggest thing I've ever gotten my hooks into. Vin Sullivan over at National wants another Superman.

FINGER

The costume fad?

KANE

Fad, schmad. It's where the money is. This is for National. Superman put them on top, and they want to stay there. And...I've got the guy.

FINGER

You've got the guy?

KANE

You bet I do! You have a drink for your ol' buddy Bob?

Bill gets up and pours a glass for Bob.

KANE

Cheap stuff?

FINGER

Bob. You get what I can afford.

KANE

Well, don't you worry, Billy-boy. You stick with me, and you won't have to sell shoes anymore.

FINGER

That's what you said about Rusty and His Pals.

KANE

Old news.

FINGER

And about Peter Pup.

KANE

Funny animals are dead.

FINGER

And Ginger Snap.

KANE

Forget all that! I have GOLD here. This is a big night, Bill.

FINGER

OK, let's see your guy.

KANE

Hey, don't rush me! I'm telling you, this is so good, it needs a great set up...

FINGER

At your leisure, Mister Kane.

Bob gets up and starts strutting about the room.

KANE

As soon as Sullivan said Superman, my brain started turning. What do the kids love about Superman?

Beat.

KANE

Huh? Come on!

FINGER

Well, that's a pretty broad field, but, at a guess, I think the idea that this milquetoast guy secretly has all this power...

KANE

Sure, sure...

FINGER

It lets all these kids who feel helpless, bullied, think that, maybe they're a hero in waiting.

KANE

C'mon, Bill...

FINGER

OK! Why don't you just tell me what you want me to say?

KANE

He flies!

Flying, OK...

FINGER

Beat. Bill expects more.

Is that your whole revelation?

FINGER

Sure. What else is there?

KANE

He's also bulletproof, super-strong...

FINGER

Kids. Love. The flying.

KANE

You know, he doesn't actually fly.

FINGER

Are you trying to be a wise guy?

KANE

He jumps.

FINGER

What?

KANE

"LEAP tall buildings in a single bound!"

FINGER

It looks like he's flying.

KANE

Beat. Bob is clearly set in stone.

So, your guy flies?

FINGER

Exactly.

KANE

FINGER

Is that the entirety of your concept?

KANE

What do you mean?

FINGER

Well, "he flies" is a pretty generic power set.

KANE

Of course there's more than that...

Beat

KANE

He flies around...and STOPS CRIME.

FINGER

You've really thought this out.

KANE

What do you have, big shot?

FINGER

If he had a magic ring that let him shoot power rays, or if he was a former pro boxer...

KANE

What about it?

FINGER

It suggests more stories and situations. Why don't you just show me what you have?

Bob brandishes his portfolio.

KANE

All right! So, I told you, after I talked with Vin, I immediately thought about this flying gimmick. You ever seen Leonardo's designs for a flying machine?

FINGER

Of course.

KANE

"Remember that your bird should have no other model than that of a bat.."

FINGER

Right.

A Bat-man!

KANE

FINGER

(smiles)

OK, I'm with you. See, THAT, is a gimmick we can work with.

KANE

So...I give you...

Kane pulls a drawing from his portfolio. On it is a man in a bright red costume, without any chest emblem. Stiff, black scalloped wings spring from his back and tether to his wrists. The mask is a simple domino mask, and the character's blonde hair flies free as he angles through the air.

It's about as far from the image of THE BATMAN we have known for the past 80 years as one could imagine.

Projected: The image of Kane's original design.

KANE

BAT-MAN!!

Finger stares at the drawing.

KANE

Well?

Finger leans back, considering.

KANE

What do you think?

FINGER

It's all wrong.

KANE

What do you mean? This is my Superman.

FINGER

The bright red suit, the blonde hair, the unwieldy cape-thing, or whatever that is...Bob, it's wrong.

KANE

You're just jealous...

FINGER

No, no...you ARE onto something, Bob. When you said "Bat-man." That was great. Maybe I've been reading The Shadow too much, but that set me off.

KANE

How so?

FINGER

You remember that film, "The Bat Whispers?"

KANE

Riiight...Chester Morris?

FINGER

That's the one. The killer wore a costume...a mask anyway. With a cape.

KANE

Yeah, yeah. It was creepy.

FINGER

Unsettling.

KANE

(seeing it)

Mysterioso..

FINGER

He could flare it out. Looked a little like wings.

KANE

Bat wings.

FINGER

Cooking with gas! What if we took it further?

KANE

Keep talking...

FINGER

A big, black cape. Scalloped, just like what you have, but cloth. I see what you're going for here, but it'd be like carrying around a kite...



KANE

It's how he flies...

Beat. Again with the flying.

FINGER

I get it, Bob...But it's ridiculous. It can be like actual wings when we want the visual, and just a cape otherwise.

He looks at Bob's drawing again.

FINGER

The red has to go.

KANE

But Superman...

FINGER

Bob. We could make a total Superman clone easy, and Sullivan would be happy as a clam. Thing is, it'd go two or three issues and disappear.

KANE

If it's good...

FINGER

Bob, let's be honest. Schuster can draw rings around you, and you know it.

KANE

...He's no Canniff, or even Eisner.

Finger looks at him, beat.

KANE

...But you're right.

FINGER

Boy...I may have to write this down in my diary. Red-letter day.

We need our own, solid, gimmick.

KANE

But...

FINGER

The red suit has to go. Superman is Superman. We need a guy who is singular. The same realm, but totally different.

KANE

Set it apart.

FINGER

Right. Superman is big and bright, launching himself through the air. Bat-Man...no, no no!...THE Bat-Man...

KANE

Ohh...I like that!

FINGER

...That sounds like a creature of the night. Maybe a little bit scary.

Kane has begun sketching

KANE

OK, I am with you.

FINGER

(laughs)

Like Dracula.

KANE

Kids love vampires.

FINGER

Sure they do.

He holds the original drawing up to Bob.

FINGER

Would a vampire be caught dead in a red suit? I say...gray. Gray and blue.

Now, this mask...

KANE

What's wrong with the mask?

FINGER

We want some mystery, right?

KANE

Right.

FINGER

What's mysterious about a blonde guy in a domino mask? It's "Bat-Man" right?

KANE

When he's flying, the hair can be fluttering, y'know?

FINGER

OK, Bob. Let's table the flying.

KANE

Bats fly. He's Bat-Man.

FINGER

So make him look like a bat! A full cowl, ears...ohh, no eyes! Just white slits. Is he even human? Who knows?

Human...That's the ticket.

The kids, they want to relate to these guys. They want to feel like they COULD be this guy, right? What if our guy tells all those kids wrapping towels around their necks and running around playing Superman they don't need powers to be a hero?

KANE

How can a superhero have no powers?

FINGER

There are kids out there, they feel helpless, and they dream that maybe, just maybe, they'll find out they were rocketed here from another planet, with powers and abilities beyond mortal man...

Well, what if our guy tells them, what if WE tell them...that's not important.

KANE

How?

FINGER

A normal guy, trained and skilled, but not bulletproof or super-strong. A keen mind, quick fists, and a scary costume and gimmick.

The Shadow can "cloud men's minds," whatever the hell that means, but...other than that? He dispenses justice at the end of his nickel-plated forty-fives.

KANE

The Shadow?! C'mon, Bill, the pulps are old news.

FINGER

Half of Superman is lifted from Doc Savage and John Carter, the other half is Moses.

KANE

Hmm?

FINGER

Come on, Bob...An orphaned child sent down the Nile to the Pharaoh's daughter? Raised by apes in deepest, darkest Africa, or by farmers in Kansas?

KANE

So we should say he's an orphan?

FINGER

We'll figure that out later...

KANE

How about this?

Kane turns over his sketch pad, and we see a figure much closer to the Bat-Man that was ultimately published. Bill takes the drawing and holds it up.

Projected: Batman as originally published

FINGER

(smiles)

Bob...I think we now have a reasonable Bat-Man.

KANE

That's great, because I told Vin we'd have one on Monday.

FINGER

Monday? Why is stuff always last minute with you?

KANE

Don't shoot the messenger! Probably didn't realize they were short on pages until they got to paste up.

FINGER

Whoo...How many pages?

KANE

Six.

FINGER

Well, that's a blessing.

Bill picks up the copy of THE SHADOW he was reading.

Projected: The cover of "Partners of Peril."

FINGER

I guess we need to improvise. "Partners of Peril." Well, we need a new title.

KANE

I thought you said we needed our own thing?

FINGER

That was before you told me we had two days!

KANE

You're just gonna steal the story?

FINGER

Once we make this deadline, we can move on. I promise you we'll put our own spin on it.

KANE

Honestly, Bill...I don't care. The check's good either way.

Finger begins to pace the room.

FINGER

All right, so...Partners of Peril...Partners in a chemical company...A chemical plant...a chemical syndicate. "The Case of the Chemical Syndicate!"

KANE

Ohhh...I like it. Sounds like a gangster film.

FINGER

So, we can tear it down, and figure out how to stick Bat-Man into it...

We need a new way to introduce the character. Superman's entire backstory is laid out in six panels on the first page in Action number one. No mystery to it at all.

KANE

What do you have in mind?

FINGER

What if “the Case of the Chemical Syndicate” isn't the only mystery? A weird figure of the night...No one knows who he is..."A Mysterious figure..."

KANE

A mysterious AND adventurous figure.

FINGER

Heh...OK. "A mysterious and adventurous figure...fighting for..." I should write this down...

Bill grabs his notebook, and begins to scribble

FINGER

"A mysterious and adventurous figure fighting for righteousness and apprehending the wrongdoer, in his lone battle against the evil forces of society..."

He looks at Bob.

FINGER

"HIS IDENTITY REMAINS UNKNOWN!"

They laugh.

KANE

They wanted a mystery man.

FINGER

First panel; it's that text, and a shadow, a bat-winged shadow on a rooftop overlooking the city.

KANE

Yeah. That's great!

FINGER

Ok, we start with the Police Commissioner...It's Weston in the Shadow story...Weston. How about Gordon?

KANE

Does it matter?

FINGER

We can change it if I think of something better. Commissioner Gordon is having a drink and smoke with a friend...

KANE

A socialite friend, a rich playboy!

FINGER

A BORED playboy.

KANE

I'm with you, like Don Diego in Zorro. Kinda foppish...no one would suspect his true identity.

FINGER

Cooking! With! Gas! We'll need a name...

KANE

Nothing ethnic.

FINGER

I'm not crazy. How about Bruce? Like Robert the Bruce?

KANE

Great.

FINGER

He's rich, monied...Old money... Should be colonial...Adams? Hancock?

KANE

Kane?

FINGER

Don't you think that's a little on the nose, Bob? How about Wayne?

KANE

Close enough.

FINGER

So, Commissioner...GORDON, and Bruce Wayne are having a drink, talking about this "mysterious Bat-Man." No one knows who he is, or where he comes from...

The phone rings, and there's been a murder!

KANE

Wayne should be bored with it all.

FINGER

(laughs)

He's so bored, so utterly disinterested...He somehow invites himself into a crime scene.

KANE

"Nothing better to do!"

They both laugh.

FINGER

The "chemical king" has been murdered, stabbed to death. His son's found the body.

KANE

His father should mutter something important to the boy with his dying breath...

FINGER

What kind of mystery do you think this is, Bob? Of course he does!

Bill is on his feet, and begins "acting out" the story.

FINGER

Someone's ransacked the room, cracked the safe, then slipped out the window as the son came in...His father mutters "Contract" to the son, and dies!

The phone rings! The guy's partner has also received a death threat! The Commissioner heads there...

KANE

With great haste, even!

FINGER

Which seems like a pretty good time for Mister Wayne to get bored enough to go home.

KANE

Or so it seems!

FINGER

Or! So! It! Seems!

At the partner's house a gunman appears! He shoots the partner dead, steals a document and escapes out the window!

KANE

Bat-Man's there!



Kane leaps up and strikes a dramatically heroic pose.

Projected: A Batman Silhouette (1)

FINGER

"THE BAT-MAN!!"

The two men rough-house a bit in mock battle.

KANE

Take that, evildoer!!

FINGER

No, no, no, Bob! A figure lurking in the shadows. A mysterious, SILENT figure!

Finger puts a finger to his lips.

FINGER

Bat-Man finds the stolen contract. Escaping into the moonlight just as the Commissioner arrives.

KANE

Too slow, Gordon! Justice is swift!

Bill rolls his eyes.

FINGER

We cut to the chemical plant. Two more partners hear the news reports of the killings.

KANE

This is complicated...

FINGER

Roll with it! It's a murder mystery, and it's only 6 pages!...

There's a big henchman at the plant, he hits the third partner over the head and trusses him up in some sort of deadly contraption.

KANE

But the Bat-Man arrives!

Kane leaps about. Finger struggles as if tied up.

Projected: Batman Silhouette (2)

KANE

Rescuing the man from certain DEATH!!

FINGER

The henchman, shocked to see this weird figure before him, reaches for his gun...

KANE

Bat-Man stops him with his quick fists!

More rough-housing.

FINGER

The last partner arrives and reveals his guilt! Now he has to finish the job, pulling a knife...but Bat-Man grabs him.

KANE

The contract?

FINGER

An agreement to buy out the other three partners. Why buy what you could inherit!?

The plot exposed, enraged, he desperately lashes out! With a mighty punch, Bat-Man sends him over a railing and into an acid tank!

Kane, obviously enamored with playing the Bat-Man, again strikes a heroic manner

Projected: Batman Silhouette (3)

KANE

A FITTING END FOR HIS KIND!

FINGER

Our terrified victim turns to thank his shadowy benefactor...but he's GONE! Disappeared into the shadows of the night!!

But the next day, we find Bruce Wayne, once again visiting the Commissioner for the "fairy tale" exploits of this masked vigilante.

KANE

But WHO is this strange figure really?

FINGER

“No one knows!” Gordon proclaims! But then at the Wayne home, the stunning reveal...

Bruce Wayne IS The Bat Man!

Both men look at each other. Beat.

KANE

That's good stuff, Bill. It's another Superman.

FINGER

No, it's not...It's Bat-Man.

You think Sullivan will like it?

KANE

He's gonna eat it with a spoon.

Finger sits at his desk, setting a piece of paper to begin his script.

KANE

Bill.

FINGER

Yeah, Bob?

KANE

This is worlds better than what I had.

FINGER

Collaboration, Mister Kane!

Bill types away, Bob sketches on his pad, but stops and watches his friend work. The lights shift.

ACT ONE - SCENE EIGHT

Drake appears.

DRAKE

When we talk about Bob, I think a lot about Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster. They were good guys. Fun to be around. Kinda naive, but good guys. I mean the famous story is that they sold Superman to Harry Donenfeld for a hundred and thirty bucks.

Which is kinda true, and kinda not. Like a lot of things in this business.

Jerry Siegel had a penthouse apartment on the park. He and Joe had contracts to churn out Superman that paid them better than anyone. They were rich! But Jerry still ended up broke and working in a mailroom by the time that movie with Chris Reeve came out in '78.

Whatever you want to say about Bob? He didn't let that happen.

Lights shift. Drake exits. The office of HARRY DONENFELD, publisher of National Periodical Publications, Bob enters with Vin Sullivan.

Projected: Image of cigars and deal-making.

SULLIVAN

Mister Donenfeld?

DONENFELD

What do you need, Vin?

SULLIVAN

This is Bob Kane, he's the one with the new Superman for Detective.

DONENFELD

Is he?

SULLIVAN

Yes, sir. It's not bad.

DONENFELD

So? Run it!

SULLIVAN

Well, there's a bit of sticking point...

DONENFELD

What?

KANE

I want a byline.

SULLIVAN

He wants credit.

DONENFELD

Nobody gets credit. We own what we publish.

KANE

I want the byline, and I want a cut.

DONENFELD

(chuckles)

The balls on this kid. I should throw you out of here. I got fifty guys who could bring me another Superman by five o'clock.

KANE

That's fine, I'm sure Dell or Crestwood would love my Bat-Man.

DONENFELD

Yeah? Will they after I drop a suit on you, AND them, for stealing my concept?

KANE

How's it yours?

DONENFELD

Vin, did you ask Bobbie here to bring you "another Superman?"

SULLIVAN

Sure did, boss.

DONENFELD

Work for hire, Bobbie. It's mine already.

KANE

Hey, Vin...Did you pay me to whip up a story?

No response.

KANE

I'm not your employee, Mister Donenfeld.

DONENFELD

You're a smartass, Kane. Hold on a second...

Donenfeld sticks his head out the office door.

DONENFELD

JACK! GET IN HERE!

You know Jack Liebowitz, Kane?

KANE

Can't say I've had the pleasure.

DONENFELD

Jack's my partner. He cooks the books around here.

JACK LIEBOWITZ enters.

LIEBOWITZ

What do you need, Harry?

DONENFELD

Jack, this is Bobbie Kane...

KANE

Robert. Or Bob, please...

DONENFELD

ROBERT has whipped up a "new Superman" for Vin here, and he's got a few...demands.

LIEBOWITZ

Oh, does he?

DONENFELD

He says he wants credit...

LIEBOWITZ

We don't do that.

DONENFELD

AND a piece of the pie.

LIEBOWITZ

We definitely don't do that.

KANE

I was thinking ten percent.

LIEBOWITZ

Are you fucking nuts?

DONENFELD

I defer to my partner.

LIEBOWITZ

If this thing, by some miracle, really is another Superman, we can talk about something, but...sight unseen? Not gonna happen.

KANE

OK, OK. Ten percent? Too much. But I'm not selling out for a hundred and fifty bucks like Siegel and Schuster. You don't have to pay me the eight hundred...

DONENFELD

No way. Not if you put a gun to my head.

LIEBOWITZ

You think we're stupid, Kane?

SULLIVAN

Don't push it, Bob.

KANE

Fine, sure. I get it. How about this? Lets say this goes through the roof, five percent. If it doesn't work, you can pull the whole thing, and we go back to the drawing board... literally.

Jack pulls Harry aside.

LIEBOWITZ

Could be a good deal for us, Harry. Short term, anyway.

DONENFELD

Hell, the fad'll probably dry up next year.

LIEBOWITZ

Exactly. A piece of nothing is no loss for us.

Donenfeld opens back up.

DONENFELD

Jack and I might be willing to entertain this...

KANE

In perpetuity.

LIEBOWITZ

Forever?

KANE

The name Robert Kane will be on every Bat-Man strip ever published. The fad dries up next month, but you bring him back in three years? Still my name on it.

DONENFELD

...and your five percent.

KANE

Well, of course.

LIEBOWITZ

TWO percent.

DONENFELD

I like that better.

KANE

Three.

DONENFELD

Jack?

LIEBOWITZ

Could work.

SULLIVAN

Who pays your team?

KANE

What team? This is all ME. Every word, every line.

Beat.

KANE

Even if it wasn't, that's my problem to worry about.

SULLIVAN

I see how it is.

KANE

Bat-Man is a Bob Kane creation, period.

DONENFELD

Jack, draw up a contract with Kane here. You make sure we get all the...uhh..."Bat-Man" stories we need, Kane.



Sounds fair.

KANE

Bob stands and extends his hand. Donenfeld stares at it.

Get out of my office.

DONENFELD

C'mon Kane, let's get the paper drawn up. I'm sure you'll want a lawyer to look it over.

LIEBOWITZ

Of course. I'm not stupid enough to trust a handshake.

KANE

Only a fool would be.

LIEBOWITZ

Kane and Liebowitz exit the office. Lights shift.